

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Water Resources Division  
Water Rights Bureau

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact**

**Part I. Proposed Action Description**

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: Bigfork County Water & Sewer District  
PO Box 1108  
Bigfork, MT 59911

2. Type of action: Groundwater Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit 76LJ  
30111037

3. Water source name: Groundwater

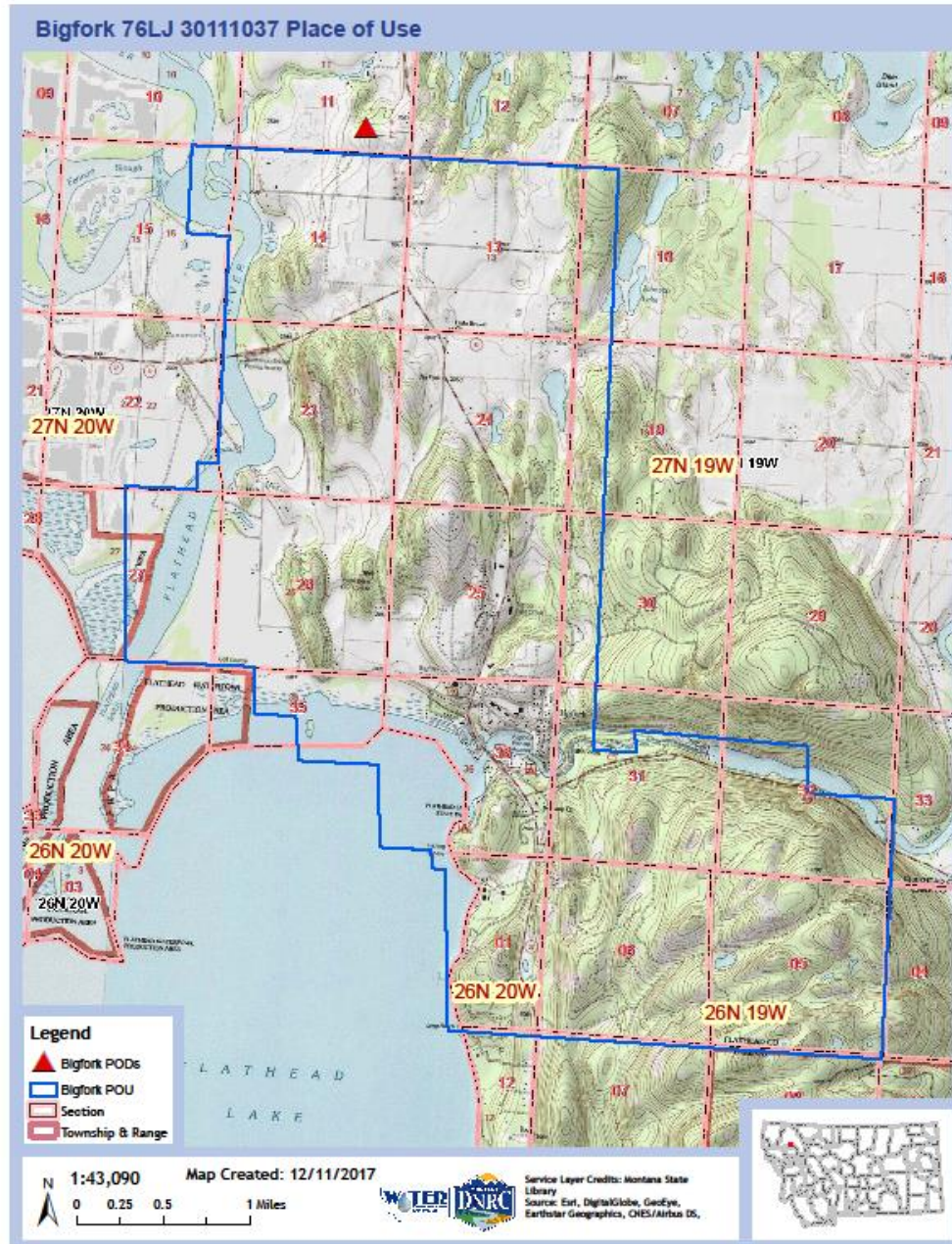
4. Location affected by project: NESWSE Section 11, Township 27N, Range 20W,  
Flathead County

5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

The proposed appropriation is from two wells located in the NESWSE Section 11, Township 27N, Range 20W, Flathead County. The proposed appropriation is 4.4 cubic feet per second (CFS) up to 154 acre-feet (AF) per year for municipal use within the Bigfork County Water & Sewer District. The proposed period of use is January 1-December 31

The DNRC shall issue a water use permit if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (DFWP)  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)  
Montana Natural Heritage Program  
National Wetlands Inventory  
USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey



## **Part II. Environmental Review**

### **1. Environmental Impact Checklist:**

#### **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

#### **WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION**

**Water quantity** - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The source of supply is groundwater. The surface water sources identified to be hydraulically connected to the groundwater aquifer are the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. Flathead River and Flathead Lake have been assessed for dewatering but have not been identified as chronically or periodically dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks.

**Water quality** - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The reach of the Flathead River which will be depleted by groundwater pumping of the Applicant's wells has not been assessed for any beneficial uses by DEQ. The reach of the Flathead River consisting of Flathead Lake has been assessed and is identified as fully supporting drinking water, primary contact recreation, and agriculture, while not fully supporting aquatic life. It is not anticipated that pumping of the Applicant's groundwater well will have any negative impacts on the water quality of the Flathead River or Flathead Lake.

**Groundwater** - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The Applicant is proposing to divert a flow of 4.4 CFS up to 154 AF annually from the groundwater aquifer. Groundwater was assessed by the Department and determined to be both physically and legally available in the amount the Applicant wishes to appropriate.

**DIVERSION WORKS** - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The means of diversion are wells. Since this is a groundwater appropriation, there will be no channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, dams, or riparian impacts to the Flathead River or Flathead Lake.

#### **UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES**

**Endangered and threatened species** - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater,

*assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or “species of special concern.”*

*Determination:* No significant impact

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified a list of seven animal species of concern within the township and range that the project’s point of diversion is in. Of this list, the Bull Trout are listed as “threatened” by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Three plant species of special concern were identified by the Montana Natural Heritage Program to potentially be in the project area. The Applicant will provide water to users within the service area of the water and sewer district and has no control over development of parcels which will be connected to the water system. It is not anticipated that any of the species of concern will be impacted by construction of the diversion works for the proposed project.

Evening Grosbeak	Pileated Woodpecker	Cassin’s Finch	Common Tern	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
Pygmy Whitefish	Bull Trout	Bristly Sedge	Guadalupe Water-nymph	Columbia Water-meal

**Wetlands** - *Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

A review of the National Wetlands Inventory does identify wetlands within the area where the wells are developed. The Applicant will provide water to users within the service area of the water and sewer district and has no control over development of parcels which will be connected to the water system.

**Ponds** - *For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

There were no natural ponds identified within the area where the wells are developed. The Applicant will provide water to users within the service area of the water and sewer district and has no control over development of parcels which will be connected to the water system.

**GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE** - *Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

This proposed beneficial use of this application is municipal use. The Applicant will provide water to users within the service area of the water and sewer district and has no control over development of parcels which will be connected to the water system. It is not anticipated that

construction of the diversion works at the point of diversion will have an impact on the soil quality, stability, or moisture content.

**VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS** - *Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

It is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit will contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the project area. The Applicant will provide water to users within the service area of the water and sewer district and has no control over development of parcels which will be connected to the water system. Noxious weed prevention will be the responsibility of the individual landowners.

**AIR QUALITY** - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

There will be no impacts to air quality associated with issuance of a water use permit.

**HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES** - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

*Determination:* N/A- Project not located on State or Federal Lands.

**DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY** - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

*Determination:* No other potential impacts have been identified.

## HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

**LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS** - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

*Determination:* No known environmental plans or goals will be impacted by this project.

**ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES** - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

*Determination:* No access or recreational activities will be significantly impacted by this project.

**HUMAN HEALTH** - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

*Determination:* This proposed project will have no significant impact on human health.

**PRIVATE PROPERTY** - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes\_\_\_ No X If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

*Determination:* No regulatory impacts are known.

**OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

*Impacts on:*

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impacts identified
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impacts identified
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impacts identified
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impacts identified
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impacts identified
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impacts identified
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impacts identified
- (h) Utilities? No significant impacts identified
- (i) Transportation? No significant impacts identified
- (j) Safety? No significant impacts identified
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impacts identified

**2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:**

Secondary Impacts No significant impacts identified

Cumulative Impacts No significant impacts identified

**3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:** None

**4. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:**

The only alternative to the proposed action would be the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not allow the Applicant to divert water for municipal use.

**PART III. Conclusion**

**1. Preferred Alternative**

Issue a water use permit if the Applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

**2 Comments and Responses**

None

**3. Finding:**

Yes\_\_\_ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Nathaniel T. Ward

Title: Water Resource Specialist

Date: December 13, 2017